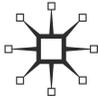


Francis Bacon and the Seventeenth-Century Intellectual Discourse

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Anthony J. Funari

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FRANCIS BACON AND THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE

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*For my father, John,
my mother, Jane, and my wife, Kim.*

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Preface

Many of the ideas for this book have morphed and evolved, been reconsidered, revised, and rewritten over the past four years. While preparing my dissertation proposal, I originally thought to examine how Francis Bacon's call to cleanse the mind of its "idols" to establish a "dry light" frustrated the project of metaphysical poetry. Through the insightful guidance of my peers and mentors at Lehigh University, the best of whom I could not distinguish between, I came to see the central tension in the narratives that emerged when reading the scientific treatises of Bacon against the poetry of John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and John Wilmot, the second Earl of Rochester.

In essence that is the focus of this book—the narratives that inform how we conceptualize our relationship to the natural world. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bacon wrote about humanity's recovering a lost inheritance. By adopting an empirical, inductive engagement with the natural world, humanity, Bacon envisioned, could restore the dominance over Nature that Adam once possessed. Humanity would again become the prevailing character in its environmental story. Against Bacon's tale of scientific advancement and restoration there arose a counternarrative, one that saw the return to an Edenic relation with Nature as beyond our ability. Furthermore, those writers who voiced this counternarrative warned against the hubris of the new scientific mind and the potential danger of human disruption of the natural world.

Though this struggle over how humanity's ecological future will be written occurred four hundred years ago, the pivotal question of how to achieve harmony between the human and more-than-human worlds still motivates current "green" conversations. Will ecological salvation come

with technological advancements that will lessen the burden we place on the environment? Or must we appreciate that the new environmental narrative will be coauthored with Nature? This book argues for the value of turning to those who resisted Bacon's scientific narrative to help us write a new tale between humanity and Nature.

Acknowledgments

This book would not exist without the institutional support that I received during my doctoral studies at Lehigh University. For the funding that allowed me to devote two uninterrupted years to researching and writing the initial version of this book, I would very much like to thank the College of Arts and Sciences. I was extraordinarily fortunate to find in the English Department at Lehigh an intellectually stimulating and personally supportive atmosphere that is so rare in doctoral programs. I would like to thank Ed Lotto, Kate Crassons, Pete Biedler, Betsy Fifer, Jan Fergus, Donna Reiss, Viv Steele, Deep Singh, and Ed Whitley. In particular, I would like to single out Carol Laub, whose dry wit helped me keep things in perspective.

For her seminar on modern and postmodern feminist theory, for the door that she left open to her students, and for the immensely productive workshop on academic publishing, Dawn Keetley deserves my appreciation. I am indebted to those who participated in the workshop and whose critiques helped to shape Chapter 2: Bob Kilker, Jennifer Hyst, Colleen Martell, Abby Aldrich, Tom O'Connor, and Wes Atkinson. This book, as well as my understanding of early modern cultural studies in general, has benefited from those who shared their work and vigorously discussed that of others in the PreModern Colloquium: Nicole Bachelor, Marie Molnar, Kim Racon, Rebecca Lynn Willoughby, Kurt Douglass, Elizabeth Dolan, and Suzanne Edwards. In the community that I became a part of at Lehigh, Elizabeth Wiggins stands out for her commitment as a friend and her brilliance as a reader; I have been privileged to take advantage of both.

For helping to prepare the final manuscript, gathering the necessary permissions, aiding in compiling the index, and showing such professionalism, I would like to thank Gabrielle Roman, with whom any author would be lucky to work.

My sincerest thanks to Barbara Traister for serving on both my exam and dissertation committees; to David Hawkes for reading numerous drafts of this work in its earlier stages, for helping me to transition from a student to a scholar, and for finding potential insights that I overlooked; and to Scott Paul Gordon, for his patience, for his mentorship, for his friendship, for his willingness to critique drafts of this book despite many other obligations, and for the comments that challenged me to reconsider and locate my own argument.

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Finally, thanks to my family—Mom, Dad, Grandma, Linda, Doug, Carroll, Jackie, Jay, and, our newest member, Jack—for their support, emotional and financial, and all the times they were there to celebrate. To say the very least, this book would never have come into being without all of them. Most important, I thank my wife, Kim, who helped me talk through ideas on the small couch in our study, who knew that the best conversations happen over a beer, who encouraged me to see the larger implications of my thoughts, and who reminded me that there is more to life than just this book.